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Health advisory for water contact at Twin Rocks and Manhattan beaches

What:

A public health advisory is now in effect at Twin Rocks and Manhattan beaches in Tillamook County due to unhealthful levels of bacterial contamination in beach waters. The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) is issuing the advisory in conjunction with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), State Parks and Recreation Department and Tillamook County Health Department.

Local residents and visitors are advised to avoid contact with waters at these beaches until the advisory is lifted. Children and the elderly in particular may be vulnerable to waterborne bacteria.

Water tests indicate unhealthful levels of enterococci, a fecal bacteria, in these waters. The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends the safe standard for enterococcus to be no more than 158 colony forming units (CFUs) per 100 milliliters of marine water.

On January 16, Twin Rocks beach water tests were at 179 CFU/100 milliliters of marine water and Manhattan Beach water tests were at 246 CFU/100 milliliters of marine water.

The advisory is in effect beginning today until follow-up samples show that contamination is within safe water quality standards. A news release will be issued when the advisory is lifted.

Action:

Local residents and beach visitors should take these precautions while this advisory is in effect:

Play on the dry sand or above the high tide line instead of swimming.

Do not wade in creeks or any area where the water is discolored.

Stay away from storm drain water or runoff and from ocean waters where runoff flows into the ocean.

Maintain a safe distance of at least 100 yards in either direction.

Avoid swimming in the ocean within 72 hours after a rainstorm.

Background:

Swimming in contaminated water can result in illnesses such as skin rashes, infections of the eyes, ears, nose and throat, and gastroenteritis. Symptoms of gastroenteritis include mild fever, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps.

Contamination sources include sewage, industrial waste discharges, storm drain runoff and domestic animal wastes. Sewage can come from failing septic systems, discharges to storm drains or cracked or blocked sewer lines. Large amounts of bird or marine mammal excrement are also sources of contamination.

Water quality is monitored at 52 beaches along the coast under the Oregon Beach Monitoring Program, funded by a grant from the EPA. Water samples are tested for enterococci bacteria, a microorganism that has been shown to have a greater correlation in marine waters with swimming-associated illnesses than other bacterial organisms.

Information:

For information about water quality testing, contact DEQ at (503) 229-5491. Information can also be obtained from the Beach Monitoring Program at (503) 731-4012 or from the Web at

www.dhs.state.or.us/publichealth/beach/index.cfm

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